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ABSTRACT

The academic progress of veteran students has delighted some and been a source of consternation to others. Three points of view seem most common: veterans do more poorly than other students; veterans do better than other students; and, veterans do not differ from other students. This study investigated the academic achievement of veterans at North Hennepin Community College. All veterans who had enrolled during the academic years 1972-73 through 1974-75 were included in the study. A record was made of credits, honor points, credit hours of non-credit-bearing grades, age, and graduation status. Veterans were found to account for about 18% of the total yearly headcount of students and about 18% of the total credit hour generation. No significant differences were found between veterans and non-veterans in average credit hour loads, grade point averages, or credit-course completion rates. In the three years studied, 70% of the veteran students persisted through all three quarters, a persistence rate felt to be not less than that of non-veteran students. The most compelling conclusion is that veterans do not differ from non-veterans in terms of academic achievement. (Author/JDS)

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The Veteran at North Hennepin Community College: 1972-1974

Janis H. Weiss

Since 1970, veterans have been enrolling on college campuses in increasing numbers. An important stimulus to these enrollment increases was the Veteran-Cost-of-Instruction-Program (VCIP) funded by Congress in 1972. The Veteran Affairs Offices established on college and university campuses with these federal funds focused on veteran recruitment programs and also provided services to the veteran once he/she was enrolled. In many institutions, the influx of veterans has helped to stablize and in some cases to increase enrollments.

The academic progress of the veteran has delighted some and been a source of consternation to others. If a sample of faculty and administrators are asked to compare the academic achievement level of veterans to that of the non-veteran student population, at least three different answers are given. One group suggests veterans do more poorly than other students, maintaining that family obligations, full-time jobs, and other personal commitments make adequate progress difficult. Others in that same group also feel veterans do more poorly but suggest less benign reasons for the lowered scholarship level, i.e. the veteran is interested only in the income provided by VA benefits not in learning. A second group feels veterans do better than other students because they are older, are more likely to be involved in established, stable relationships, and have a greater sense of purpose in being in school. And a third group will say that the veteran is no different than the non-veteran student, at least in terms of academic achievement. In the absense of definite information about the achievement level of veterans, each group is free to maintain its own bias.

In order to investigate the academic achievement level of veterans on the North Hennepin Community College campus, a list was developed of all

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veterans, certified for VA benefits, who enrolled at North Hennepin during the 1972-73, 1973-74, and 1974-75 academic years. A record was made of the credits, honor points, and credit hours of non credit-bearing grades earned by each veteran in each quarter (Fall, Winter, and Spring only). In addition age and graduation status was recorded.

Results

Enrollment

Table 1 indicates the veteran enrollment by quarter during the 1972-73, 1973-74, and 1974-75 academic years, total veteran headcount by year (duplicative total), the total number of different veterans enrolled each year (non-duplicative total), and the percentage of the total North Hennepin headcount attributable to veterans.

Table 1
Veteran enrollment during the 1972-1974 academic years

Year	Fall	Winter	Spring	Duplicative Headcount	% of Total NH Headcount	Non-duplicative Total
1972-73	399	448	411	1258	18.17%	543
1973-74	445	467	436	1348	18.61	594
1974-75	428	532	540	1500	17.86	704

There was an 8.6% increase in the number of enrolled veterans (duplicative headcount) between 1972-73 and 1973-74 academic years and a 15.6% increase between 1973-74 and 1974-75. The veteran accounted for about 18% of the total yearly North Hennepin student headcount. The increase in the veteran headcount has paralleled closely the increase in the total North Hennepin headcount, dropping only slightly during the 1974-75 academic year.

Table 2 indicates the number of credit hours generated by the veterans and the percent of the total North Hennepin credit hour generation attributable to the veterans.

Table 2
Veteran credit hour generation during the 1972-1974 academic years

Year	Fall	Winter	Spring	Total	% of Total NH Credit Generation
1972-73	4806	5427	4869	15102	18.31%
1973-74	5246	5455	4981	15682	18.90
1974-75	4824	5920	5884	16628	17.79

The increase in veteran headcount was greater than the increase in credit hour generation. However, the veteran credits still accounted for about 18% of the total North Hennepin credit generation, indicating that overall at North Hennepin there has been a slight increase in the number of part-time students or at least generally there has been a slight decrease in the average number of credit hours taken by students between 1972 and 1974.

Table 3 shows more clearly the decrease in the number of credit hours taken by the average veteran and the average North Hennepin student.

Table 3
Average credit hour loads of veterans and North Hennepin students-in-general

	Veteran			Students-in-general		
Year	Fall	Winter	Spring	Fall	Winter	Spring
1972-73	12.0	12.1	11.8	12.0	12.1	11.7
1973-74	11.8	11.9	11.4	11.7	11.6	11.0
1974-75	11.3	11.3	10.9	11.4	11.3	10.7

Although the decrease in average credit load has not been great, amounting to an average of slightly more than one credit hour per student over the three year period, it nevertheless has been a persistent and quite consistent decline. The average veteran as well as the average student-in-general is no longer carrying a full-time credit load, defined by the VA and the Community College System as 12 quarter credit hours.

Grade Point Average

The concern about the veteran on campus has never been about their importance in bolstering or helping to maintain enrollment levels. They have been and are an important source of students. Concern has been expressed, however, about their academic progress once on the campus. Table 4 gives the average GPAs of the veterans over the three year period.

Table 4
Mean grade point average of veterans

Year	Fall	Winter	Spring
1972-73	2.761*	2.742*	2.754*
1973-74	2.729	2.789	2.774
1974-75	2.769	2.783	2.792

*During the 1972-73 academic year, the F grade was given and was averaged into the GPA. In order to insure comparability over the three year period, the 1972-73 average GPAs were computed without averaging in the F grade.

A study completed by Mrs. Kathleen Anderson (February 7, 1975) indicated that the median cumulative GPA of North Hennepin students having 36 or more credits was 2.7. Beginning with Winter Term 1976, the Grade Distribution Report from the Computer Center included data which allowed computation of an overall North Hennepin GPA. The mean GPA for Winter Quarter, 1976 was 2.808. These data indicated that, in terms of mean GPA, the veteran does not differ from the average North Hennepin student.

Course Completion

Although the GPAs of veterans and non-veterans do not differ, were veterans less likely to complete their course work with credit-bearing grades than were non-veteran North Hennepin students? Table 5 indicates the percentage of credit hours for which the veterans enrolled which were completed with credit-bearing grades (A,B,C,D).

Table 5
Percentage of courses completed by veterans with credit-bearing grades

Year	Fall	Winter	Spring	Overall
1972-73	78.17%*	77.70%*	75.44%*	77.1%
1973-74	73.94	75.03	70.21	73.1
1974-75	71.50	78.23	74.80	75.0

*Computed to exclude F grades as credits completed. See note on Table 4.

Over the three year period, veterans, on the average, have completed with credit-bearing grades, three-fourths of the credits for which they were enrolled. Comparable figures on the total North Hennepin student population were not available for these academic years. However, during the Winter Quarter of 1976, all students at North Hennepin completed 79% of the credits for which they registered. The difference between the two groups while favoring the North Hennepin student-in-general, is too small to be viewed as significant.

There are a number of students each term who receive no credit-bearing grades in the courses in which they register. Checking a sample of 400 Winter Quarter, 1976 North Hennepin students, it was found that 14% received no credit-bearing grades for that quarter. In the veteran sample for the preceeding years (Winter Quarter only), the percentages were as follow: 1972-73--11%; 1973-74--13%; 1974-75--11%. Again the differences were very small, although in this case favored the veteran.

Persistence

Table 6 indicates the percentage of veterans enrolled in Fall Quarter who continued into Winter Quarter, the percentage who continued from Winter Quarter to Spring Quarter, the percentage who were enrolled in Fall and Spring quarters only, and the percentage of Fall enrollees who completed all three quarters.

Table 6
Persistence rates for veterans within a single academic year

Year	Fall-Winter	Winter-Spring	Fall-Spring	Fall-Winter-Spring
1972-73	86%	81%	2%	71%
1973-74	83	81	1	68
1974-75	84	82	0.5	70
Mean	84	82	1	70

In the absence of comparable data on the total North Hennepin student population, it is difficult to interpret these data. Seventy percent of those who enrolled in Fall Quarter persisted through all three quarters. There is about a 15% attrition rate from one term to the next.

The persistence rate from one academic year to the next was checked for the 1973-74 to 1974-75 academic years only. Forty-nine percent of the veterans enrolled in 1973-74 were enrolled also in 1974-75. An additional 13% of the 1973-74 group had graduated. Persistence rate from the freshman to sophomore years for the total North Hennepin student population is quoted generally as being 37%. However, this figure is not based upon following individuals from one year to the next but rather is based upon the size of the freshman class in one year and the size of the sophomore class in the succeeding year. Thus it can only be suggested that the veteran persistence rate is probably not lower and may indeed be higher than for students-in-general.

Age

The average age of the veterans enrolled at North Hennepin Community College has increased slightly over the three year period: 1972-73--25.16; 1973-74--25.91; and 1974-75--25.96 years of age[1]. The median age for North Hennepin students-in-general was 21 during the 1975-76 academic year.

[1]The median age of the veterans was similar to the mean age.

In order to investigate the relationship between measures of academic achievement and age, mean GPA and the percentage of courses completed with credit-bearing grades were computed for four age groupings. The results are contained in Table 7.

Table 7

Average GPA and percent of courses completed with credit-bearing grades for four age groupings of veterans

Age	Average GPA	% courses completed
23 or less	2.746	75.93%
24-26	2.763	72.36
27-29	2.819	74.68
30 or more	2.839	77.01

There was a tendency, although very slight, for average GPA to increase with increasing age. The oldest age group followed by the youngest age group were the most likely to complete with credit-bearing grades the courses in which they registered. Thus even though the average North Hennepin student is younger than the average veteran there does not appear to be any consistent or subtle factors at work within the College which makes it more difficult for older students to function academically. It may be, however, that the veteran or the non-veteran student in the middle to late 20's has other obligations and/or pressures in his/her life which make it more difficult for them to complete their course work.

Conclusions

Looking from all possible angles at the data collected on the veteran on the North Hennepin Community College campus, the most compelling conclusion is that they do not differ from students-in-general in terms of academic achievement. They enroll in and complete with credit-bearing grades approximately the same number of credits as does the general student body and the

GPAs of the two groups do not differ. It is possible that as a group veterans are more likely to persist from one academic year to the next but in the absence of directly comparable data, this statement remains in the realm of speculation.

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